DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 072 322 AC 014 157

| | |
|---|---|
| AUTHOR | Lewis, Harry |
| TITLE | Communication Barriers between Educated and Uneducated Persons. |
| PUB DATE | [68] |
| NOTE | 12p.; Published in International Adult Education, May 1973 |
| EDRS PRICE | MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29 |
| DESCRIPTORS | *Communication Problems; Cultural Factors; Educational Experience; *Language Handicaps; *Lower Class; *Middle Class; *Social Problems; Verbal Ability |

ABSTRACT

Effective communication between middle class, or educated (12th grade and up) and the lower class, or uneducated (8th grade or less) is discussed from the standpoint of problems suggested by potential discontinuity brought about by signs (or language) and common experience. Research in the field is cited. It is suggested that if the people of the subculture are to be educated, administered, and persuaded into self-sufficiency and conformity by a benevolent government of, by, and for the middle class, then the middle class must somehow improve communication with the target population. (DB)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

HARRY LEWIS
PUBLISHED IN INTERNATIONAL
ADULT ED MAY 73.

ED 072322

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS BETWEEN EDUCATED AND UNEDUCATED PERSONS

Although mass communication theory and education research have been peripherally concerned with the problem, little direct research has been done on the differences in use of language between middle class or educated (12th grade and up) and the lower class or uneducated (eighth grade or less).[1]

Schramm's formula for effective communication suggests several areas of potential discontinuity:

1. The message must be so designed and delivered as to gain the attention of the intended destination.
2. The message must employ signs which refer to experience common to source and destination.
3. The message must arouse personality needs in the destination and suggest some ways to meet those needs.
4. The message must suggest a way to meet those needs which is appropriate to the group situation in which the destination finds himself at the time when he is moved to make the desired response.[2]

Because of its limited scope, this paper will concern itself only with the problems suggested by Schramm's second point; signs (or language), and common experience.

Although there may be a conspicuous language discontinuity due to differences in vocabulary level, in dialect, or even in the mother tongue, there is evidence that a cultural dis-

AC014157

continuity is at least as great a barrier to communication, since speech therapy and ESL class have been more effective among children of middle and upper class parents, e.g., Cuban refugees in Florida as compared with Spanish-American migrants.[3]

How does culture block communication? Pye says, "Communication is the web of human society."[4] The common experience necessary to the meaningful exchange of words (Schramm) is culture; experiencing in common is made possible by the agreed-upon language. We do not perceive what we do not have in the scope of our language.[5] For example, the Zuni do not have separate words for orange and yellow, and naive Zuni subjects cannot sort yellow and orange chips. Physically they are quite capable of distinguishing between the two, and when taught the proper labels, can sort them efficiently.[6]

It is not surprising that some of the words encountered by lower class children in their middle class schools are meaningless even when a formal definition is drilled into them. So different is their group experience from that of the middle class students that anthropologist/sociologist Oscar Lewis has made a strong case for a culture or sub-culture of poverty, "both an adaptation and a reaction of the poor to their marginal position in a class-stratified,highly individuated, capitalistic society."[7] He points out that this

culture (like any other) is transmitted and self-perpetuating. By the time children are about six years old, he finds, they are so acculturated that they will probably not be able to take advantage of education and other opportunities later in life.

Weikert[8] studied five-year-olds of the two groups, lower and middle class, and found a disparity of two years and more in the way they used language, regardless of what language (Spanish, Indian, English) they spoke in the home. The lower class children were notably unable to use connectives to form sentences showing relationships, as between cause and effect. Such language devices, of course, are keys to the later-needed ability to abstract. This language gulf widens every year the child attends school.

This "differential response to the educational opportunity made by children of different social classes" prompted an ethnographic study of communication as it related to social structure by Bernstein[9]. He concluded that orientation to the "restricted code" of the lower class or to the "elaborated code" of the middle class "is entirely a matter of the sociological constraints." The restricted code produces highly predictable (prescribed) communication, in both vocabulary and structure. There may be illogical or even unintelligible sequences, to the outsider listening in, as the speakers assume a great deal of common experience and unanimous reaction

to that experience. There is a great stress on the status aspect of social relationships; and "the code reinforces the form of the social relation by restricting the verbal signaling of differences." There is little or no signaling of individual intent, or individual (unique) experience. This both grows out of and is reinforced by the underprivileged person's low opinion of himself.

An elaborated code, on the other hand, makes much of individual intent, experience, and personal meaning. Social roles are more flexible, more demanding, and very with social occasion. There must be "practice and training" for the role, not the least of which is skill in the "verbal elaboration of meaning."

The Schatzman-Strauss study[10] also dealt with culture-mediated differences in communication. They analyzed the content and structure of transcribed interview protocols which had been taped by participants in a disaster. They chose as representatives of lower class those with eighth grade education or less, with family income of less that two thousand dollars. The upper group were persons with one or more years of college, and family incomes of four thousand dollars or more.

They found "striking"differences between the educated and uneducated groups in the way their communication was organized. They differed in four ways:

The lower class communicator recounted -- with more or less detail, accuracy and logic, depending on his innate ability -- his impressions of what he had seen, done, and suffered. He tried to reproduce a point-to-point concrete experience. The more educated person used a variety of perspectives in telling what he had perceived to happen, not necessarily to himself, and what others had apparently thought, felt, or tried to do. It was as though, the authors said, the educated filmed a scene using several cameras from different angles, while the uneducated was himself a single camera.

The educated or middle class narrator was conscious of the listener's role, aware of what the interviewer did not know and needed to learn, and of the impression his own account was making on the interviewer. He corrected himself, or added needed explanation, without prompting. The uneducated person, on the other hand, tended to assume that the interviewer's experiences and reactions were the same as his, so that he had to be guided with probing questions to make a coherent, complete account.

The uneducated person omitted classifications. Instead of saying "my brother" he would say "Jim," and persons mentioned in the narrative were seldom identified by position, function, or relationship. There was much use of pronouns without antecedents. He was unlikely to mention groups as

abstractions, such as "the able-bodied men of the community." The educated, on the other hand, used a few proper names, referring to persons in their stories by generalized identifications, as "the only doctor in town."

The educated person also had a command of "organizing frameworks and stylistic devices." The uneducated person strung a personal narrative on "and," "so," and other unsophisticated connectives. Interrupted for explanatory details, he might get involved in a new line of thought, and require prompting to get back to the main line of the narrative. Educated persons, on the other hand, could apparently sketch out in their own minds all they wanted to communicate, and enrich this with explanations, details, and speculation without losing the overall pattern.

The uneducated communicate well within their own group; where content and structure are prescribed and much experience is shared; middle class verbal skills are not needed. Except for school children, most of the lower class' communication with the middle and upper classes is in a restricted code: formal, limited, status-oriented. It is associated with narrow and inflexible roles, such as employee, welfare recipient, or prisoner.

In a recent book, The Psychology of Human Communication, John Parry[11] explored communication difficulties between the bureaucracy and the governed. Among the seven barriers to

communication be formulated, three are particularly relevant to the lower class discontinuity: the unstated assumption, incompatibility of schemata, and the intrusion of unconscious or partly conscious mechanisms.

The uneducated, of course rely heavily on unstated assumptions in the primary group (Bernstein, Schatzman-Strauss). The middle class communicator, however, has unstated assumptions of his own, often not the same as the lower class person's. There is, therefore, double distortion.

Perhaps the greatest barrier between the classes is the "incompatibility of schemata," which Parry defines as our "sets and attitudes that affect our reception of new information." An individual's schema is a kind of working model of "how things really are," and is formed very young, partly by our learning the language with which we think about our environment, and partly by individual experience and the consensus of the group of which we are part. New information is fitted into the schemata, once formed, with as little adjustment and reconstruction of the basic model as possible.

The "unconscious or partly conscious mechanism" that impinge on incoming information are such well-known devices as projection, repression, and identification, as explored in the Allport-Postman study of rumor.[12]

This multiplex barrier to communication between the classes is not exclusively a western problem. Oscar Lewis believes

that the culture of poverty is world-wide, that it may originate in a period of "rapid technological change," in a period of colonizing and westernizing when "native social and economic structure is smashed."[13] Western technology, and the western-style education that must accompany it, increase the culture gap between urban/middle class and rural/poor in the developing countries.

In the Wollof study,[14] children raised side by side in the same village showed remarkable differentiation in language use and communication skills when part of them attended a western-style school and part of them did not. This difference would be intensified if, as often occurs in transitional countries, the educated were city-bred and affluent, and the uneducated were poor and village-bound. In fact, sociologist Thomas Adam observed on a study tour of emerging African nations that the leaders, educated abroad and acculturated to the western world, often despised the masses of the natives, and had no real communication with them.[15]

There are many reasons why it has become desirable for the middle class to communicate with the lower class, but they are variants of two basic causes: Government is middle class, and the technological/economic system is middle class.

Modern government, modern technology, and modern education are intricately interdependent. Everywhere in the world where a nation has successfully developed western-style technology

there arises a middle class: Western style education is needed to provide the manpower and brainpower for technological development, which rewards its participants with relative affluence, relative leisure, and a kind of bonus of intellectual energy and self-confidence.

The world today is geared to mass man: mass production, mass consumption, mass communication, and mass government. There is a limit to the number of non-producers, non-consumers, non-taxpayers, and non-conformers a modern economy can tolerate and remain healthy.

There is also the problem sketched by Riesmann[16] that mass man (today's middle class or mainstream culture) is other-directed. Hence the government is increasingly responsive to all segments of the population. Yet how can it make an intelligent response to the non-communicating sub-culture, or sub-cultures, of poverty?

Merton[17] suggested that ghettos and slums breed not one but three sub-cultures, all characterized by some form of anomie: crime; conflict, as race riots; and retreat, as drug addiction. We still have the problem of the non-literate voter, which is bad enough; but we also have the problem of the non-literate anomic non-voter exerting destructive pressures against the government which he feels helpless to influence in any other way. Yet ironically the government and economic system are concerned about him as never before, and trying to respond to his needs.

The sub-culture of poverty, then, has become recognized as a political liability and an economic burden. But if the people of the subculture are to be educated, administered and persuaded into self sufficiency and conformity by a benevolent government of, by, and for the middle class, then the middle class must somehow improve communication with the target population.

How can the children of the poor be taught to communicate? If this is a function of the public schools, why should there be a communication problem at all today? All western and westernized have free compulsory education. Obviously middle class educators should be doing something more, something better, or something different. How can the middle class improve their own ability to communicate with the poor? Where does the change begin?

## BIBLIOGRAPHY


1 Rosenthal, Robert and Jacobson, Lenore. Self-Fulfilling Prophecies in the Classroom: Teachers' Expectations or Unintended Determinants of Pupils' Intellectual Competence. Social Class, Race, and Psychological Development, ed. Martin Deutsch (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968), pp. 219-53.

2 Schramm, William. The Process and Effect of Mass Communication. (University of Illinois Press, 1965), p. 13.

3 Ulibarri, Horacio. Aculturation Problems of the Mexican-American. Proceedings of the Conference on Adult Education in Southwestern Educational Laboratory, Inc. (Albuquerque, July 29-30, 1968).

4 Pye, Lucian W. Communications and Political Development. (Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.4.

5 Schramm, op. cit.

6 Schramm, op. cit.

7 Lewis, Oscar. Backgrounds for La Vida. (New York: Random House, 1968) pp. 5-6
Children of Sanchez, (Vintage Books, 1965), p. XXIV.

8 Weickert, David, personal communication. Bilingual Workshop, Boulder Colorado.

9 Bernstein, Basil, Elaborated and Restricted Codes; Their Social Origins and Some Consequences. Communications and Culture, ed. A. G. Smith, (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966.)

10 Schatzman, Leonard and Strauss, Anselm, Social Class and Modes of Communication. Communications and Culture, ed. A. G. Smith. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1966), p. 7.

11 Parry, John, Psychology of Human Communication, (London: University of London Press, Ltd., 1967), p. 84.

12 Allport, Gordon W. and Postman, Leo. An analysis of rumor. Public Opinion Quarterly, 1946, 10. pp. 501-17.

13 Lewis, op. cit.

14 Bruner, Jerome. Bib.

15 Adams, Thomas R., Government and Politics in Africa South of the Sahara. (New York: Random House, 1959.)

16 Riesman, Davis, The Lonely Crowd, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1950).

17 Merton, Robert K, The American Dream, Opportunity, Structure and Deviance.

FEB 7 1973
on Adu